

# The Polish Army Recruiting Station in Canada during World War II

Windsor, Ontario 1941-1942



**General Bronisław Duch (1896-1980)**  
**Commander of the Recruiting Station in Windsor**

*"Poland will rise up out of Her enormous Heartbreak and will be as great also in a time of peace, as is the Name of Poland great in the world today, Windsor 11.XI 1941."*  
Bronisław Duch, General

## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Second World War and Poland
- Negotiations between the Polish and Canadian Governments
- The Polish Army in Canada
- The Recruiting Station in Windsor
- Owen Sound Training Camp
- Expectations and Outcomes
- Odsiecz: Polish Army Newspaper
- Uniforms and Insignia
- Where They Fought
- Remembering

# The Second World War and Poland

On September 1st, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Western Poland and World War II began. On the 17th of September, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the East. The September 1939 Campaign lasted just over a month and Poland was completely overrun by October 6th, 1939. On August 23rd, 1939, the two invading countries had signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which had divided the captured Polish territories into two spheres of influence. Once defeat was imminent, many Polish Government and military officials escaped to France and to England, where they established a government-in-exile. They held fast to the hope that Poland would be liberated and exist once again as a free nation.



A map of Poland before September 1, 1939. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*

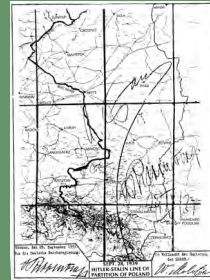


The beginning of WWII, Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 - breaking a borderline. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*



A map of Poland after invasions by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*

Right: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on August 23, 1939, dividing Poland. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*



## Negotiations between the Polish and Canadian Governments

Negotiations between the Polish government-in-exile and the Canadian government started on September 16, 1939. The Polish government sought to recruit Polish citizens living abroad to join in the defense of their homeland. At first, plans were drafted to assemble a Polish army made up of Polish expatriates in France. This plan unfortunately fell through, when France was conquered by Nazi Germany in June of 1940. In April 1941, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, Władysław Sikorski, visited Canada and finalized plans for the recruiting and training of Polish military units on Canadian soil. Alfred Falter, the Polish Minister of Finance, agreed to deposit \$2 million worth of gold and over \$400,000 in currency into the Bank of Canada in order to pay for the rental of facilities and the training of Polish troops.



Malcolm MacDonald, the UK High Commissioner in Canada, General Władysław Sikorski and Prime Minister Mackenzie King. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



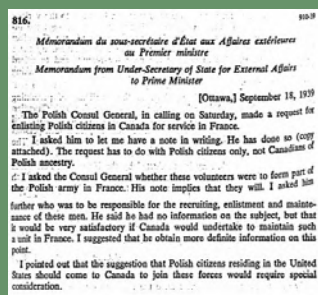
Prime Minister Mackenzie King welcomes General W. Sikorski. *Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, Victor and Muriel Podoski collection.*



Left: General W. Sikorski. *Courtesy of Library of Congress of USA.*



Right: Alfred Falter, Treasurer of Polish Government. *Courtesy of Wikipedia.*



Left top: A telegram, October 7, 1940, with agreement to recruit Polish soldiers in Canada. *Courtesy National Ministry of Foreign Affairs cables.*

Left: A first telegram sent to Canada on September 18, 1939, regarding recruitment Polish soldiers in Canada. *Courtesy National Ministry of Foreign Affairs cables.*



# The Polish Army in Canada



The recruits were to be led by Polish officers. On July 17th, 1941, a detachment of 43 Polish officers arrived in Canada. Their leader was General Bronisław Duch. Duch was fluent in English and Polish and a highly respected military logistician, who had gained the recognition of both the British and French governments.



General Bronisław Duch. *Courtesy of The Polish Army Veterans Association, Post 126.*



General Bronisław Duch in Montreal July 19, 1940. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 6.*



43 Polish officers arrived to Windsor on July 21, 1941. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 7.*

1<sup>st</sup> Right: Recruitment poster. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Right: Recruitment poster. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw.*

3<sup>rd</sup> Right: Recruitment poster. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



## The Recruiting Station in Windsor



A recruitment centre was located in Windsor, because of its close proximity to the United States, and a training camp was established in Owen Sound. The old East Windsor Town Hall was provided rent-free by the City of Windsor. The interior was renovated to provide room for recruiting and administration offices as well as medical inspection rooms and equipment storage depots. "Henckel House", also provided rent-free by the City of Windsor, was renamed "Polish House" and was renovated to accommodate offices and officers' quarters. The second floor of the Burroughs Adding Machine Company was altered to provide barracks space for 300 recruits, enlisted in Windsor before they were transferred to the training center in Owen Sound.



Old Ford City Hall, pre-WWII. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki.*



"Henckel House", transformed into the Headquarters of the Polish Army in Windsor, 1941. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



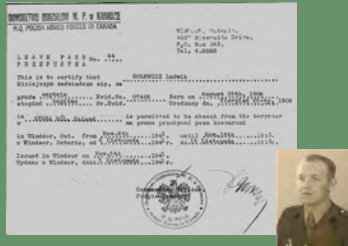
Right: General Duch and his staff in front of the Polish Army Headquarters in Windsor, 1941. *Courtesy of Agata Rajski.*

Left: General Duch and his staff in front of the Polish Army Recruiting Station (Old Ford City Hall). *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



The Burroughs Machine Company, redesigned to create soldiers' barracks. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper (L) Vol. 1, No. 5, (M) Vol. 1, No. 13, and (R) Jerzy Barycki (2008).*

Medical evaluations for Volunteers to the Polish Army. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



Ludwik Rolewicz, Polish Army Recruitment Camp Release Card. *Courtesy of Ludwik Rolewicz.*

Frank Bielecki, Polish Army Recruitment Card. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki.*

List of volunteers to the Polish Army, September 1945. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki.*

Both the Polish community centre, Dom Polski, and the Polish parish, Holy Trinity, were critical to supporting the Polish recruits by holding rallies, hosting picnics, putting on shows, and other activities to keep recruit morale high.



Military Band in front of Dom Polski Hall in 1941. *Photograph courtesy of Agata Rajski.*

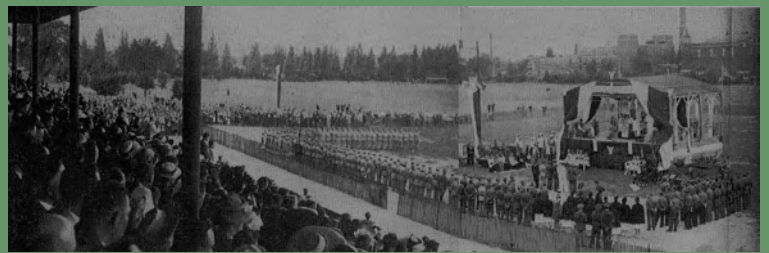
Dom Polski Hall in 2004. *Photograph courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*

R.C. Holy Trinity Church in 2005. *Photograph courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*

R.C. Holy Trinity Church altar c. 1955-1957. *Photograph courtesy of Agata Rajski.*



Right: Holy Mass held for the Polish Army at Jackson Park, 1942. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 13.*



Dom Polski Programme for the Polish Army in 1941. *Courtesy of Polish People's Home Association.*

General Duch attending a Polish Exhibition in Toronto. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 10.*

The final lowering of flags at the Polish Army headquarters in Windsor, 1942. *Courtesy of Polish People's Home Association.*



# Owen Sound Training Camp

Although recruitment was centered in Windsor, the majority of the training was conducted in Owen Sound, Ontario. The area outside of Owen Sound gave the Polish troops plenty of room for target practice, driving military vehicles, and mock battles. The presence of Polish recruits in Owen Sound can still be seen today in the form of a beech tree with the opening words of the Polish national anthem carved into it, "Poland is not yet lost, as long as we still live."



Soldiers meeting the Commander, General Duch. *Courtesy of Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



Polish Navy Induction Ceremony. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No.9.*



Polish Air Force strategy meeting. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No.17.*



Mortar training. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No.18.*



Polish tanks in Owen Sound. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 6.*



Polish soldiers leaving for the front line. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No.10.*



Polish ship Piłsudski at Owen Sound. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 16.*



Polish Army receives ambulance from the local community. *Courtesy of the Windsor Star*



Polish Army cemetery at Niagara-on-the-Lake. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 15.*



Polish national anthem carved on a tree at Owen Sound by Polish soldiers. *Courtesy of Sev-enacres Blog.*

## Expectations and Outcomes

Recruitment went well and many Americans travelled to Windsor and enlisted. On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the United States entered the Second World War after the Imperial Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Potential American recruits heading to Windsor were diverted to the US Army and the number of Polish troops in Windsor dwindled. At the beginning of the recruitment drive, it was estimated that tens of thousands of Polish Canadians and many thousands more Polish Americans would volunteer for the Polish Army forming in Windsor and Owen Sound. Even though a large number of potential recruits joined the Canadian and US armies, the Windsor Recruiting Station still managed to recruit 722 volunteers to join the Polish Army.



General Duch in Chicago, promoting recruitment to the Polish Army. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



Left: The Polish Armed Forces in Windsor, 1941. *Courtesy of Polish People's Home Association.*



Right: Polish soldiers recruited in Windsor. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 10.*



Polish Air Force officers in Windsor. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 13.*



Polish Air Force. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 23.*



Polish Air Force plane. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 17.*



Left: Sailors departing from Windsor. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 22.*



Right: Sailors recruited in Windsor. *Courtesy of the Fighting Poland Newspaper Vol. 1, No. 7.*



Marine unit inspection before departure to Great Britain. *Courtesy of Frank Kmiotowicz "Polish Armed Forces in Canada". during WWII".*



Left: Destroyer ORP Krakowiak. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki*



Frank Bielecki with friends in front of his warship ORP J. Conrad. R. Nałęcz-Tymiński, Polish and Canadian war hero, was the last Commander of this ship in 1945. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki*

Right: Submarine ORP Dzik. *Courtesy of Frank Bielecki.*

## Odsiecz: Polish Army Newspaper

In order to reach a large number of potential recruits in Canada and the USA, the recruiting office began to publish a magazine about the Polish Army in Windsor. *Odsiecz*, meaning *Relief Force*, was published weekly in Windsor and ran 35 issues in total. This magazine described the training and life of the recruits at the Owen Sound Training Camp and promoted patriotism, provided news from the front, and updates from the Polish Underground army. The magazine was published in the Victor Williamson house in Old Walkerville. Word about the recruitment efforts spread across the United States as groups such as "Friends of the Polish Soldiers in Canada" distributed the *Odsiecz* magazine in major US cities.



Stone House in Windsor, where Polish Army newspaper was edited. *Courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*



Examples of the Polish Army newspaper printed in Windsor. *Courtesy of the Polish Army Veterans' Association, Post 126.*

## Uniforms and Insignia

The uniforms and insignia worn by the Polish recruits were manufactured in Canada. The Polish Army traditionally wore the *Rogatywka*, a four-sided peaked cap. Muir Cap and Regalia Limited, a Toronto-based company, produced these hats with a unique yellow trim, signifying that the soldier was a North American recruit. Enlisted soldiers were also given unique shoulder patches with the Canadian, US, and Polish flags as well as an eagle-shaped badge that was made by the Toronto based G.J Gerratt Company.



WWII Polish Army medals- Lt. Konstanty Bortkiewicz. *Courtesy of the Archives and Museum of the Polish Combatants' Association in Toronto.*



WWII Polish Army medals- Capt. Zygmunt Armata. *Courtesy of Zygmunt Armata.*



WW II Polish Army cap and eagle-Garratt, Toronto 1941. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



WW II Polish Army badges. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*

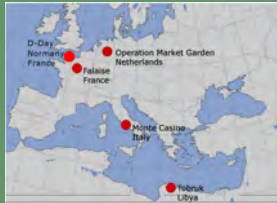
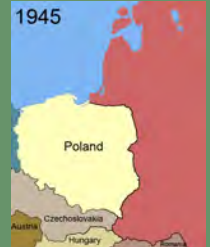


WW II Polish Army dress L. Witkowski. *Courtesy of Antoni Zawadzki.*



## Where They Fought

Some of the troops recruited in Windsor and trained in Owen Sound joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Armored Division, which fought with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Army under General Montgomery. They were instrumental in closing the Falaise pocket in August of 1944, a significant Allied victory. Soldiers were also involved in operations in the North African Campaign, the Italian Campaign (especially in the battle for Monte Casino), and Operation Market Garden.



Top from left to right: Battle of Monte Casino, operation Market Garden in Arnhem, and battle at Falaise. *Courtesy Wikipedia Commons.*

Left: Map showing, where soldiers recruited in Windsor fought during WWII. *Courtesy Peter Sawicki.*

General Guy Simonds inspects the 2nd Canadian Corps, fighting alongside the Poles on May 31, 1945. *Courtesy Wikipedia Commons.*

Map of Poland after WWII. *Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.*

## Remembering

After the Second World War, many veterans from the recruitment drive did not return to Poland, as it had fallen under communist and Soviet influence. They found themselves back in Windsor and the community still remembers and celebrates their accomplishments. In 2005, the Polish community centre Dom Polski, unveiled a plaque commemorating the recruitment drive and the partnership between Poland and Canada during the Second World War.



Unveiling by the Consul General of Poland in Toronto, Piotr Konowrocki, of the memorial plaque, commemorating the presence of the recruitment unit of the Polish Army in Windsor, 2005. *Courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*

From left: D. Cassivi, J. Barycki, A. Garllicki, K. Starobrat, J. Watson and A. Krezel, 2005. *Courtesy of Ewa Barycka*



Memorial plaque, commemorating the presence of the recruitment unit of the Polish Army in Windsor. *Courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*

Veterans at a banquet in the Dom Polski, 2006. *Courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*

From left: J. Sala, F. Bielecki and J. Wilk, all connected to the Windsor Recruiting Station, 2006. *Courtesy of Jerzy Barycki.*

Members of an excursion group from Windsor by the grave of General B. Duch at Monte Casino, 2001. *Courtesy of Ewa Barycka.*

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**Internet:** Wikipedia Commons

Peter Sawicki, Windsor, Ontario

## Acknowledgements

The Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor (PCBPAW) with a team from the University of Windsor and other partners has prepared this display as a tribute to Canada on its 150th anniversary of Confederation. This exhibition documents the Polish-Canadian community's history as part of Canada's history and success, and highlights the special bond between Canada and Poland. This project expresses, with gratitude, the connection between Poland, Polonia and Canada. We are very grateful to the Leddy Library of the University of Windsor and our Association team for the production of this display: Joan Dalton, Marg McCaffrey Piche, and Frank Simpson under the patronage of Pascal Calarco, Dean of the Library. We offer special thanks to Peter Sawicki (the author of the text), Stan Skrzyszewski, Tomasz Bakalarz, Janusz Pietrus, Alina Jurkiewicz-Zejdowska, Maciej Skoczeń, Stefan Władysiek and others, who contributed to the project. Many thanks to our financial supporters: the Polonia Centre (Windsor) Inc., the Leddy Library of the University of Windsor and our Association.

Jerry (Jerzy) Barycki

Windsor, March 15, 2017.

President, PCBPAW, and Project Co-ordinator/Designer

## Many thanks to our generous sponsors



## Many thanks to our contributors



The Wanda Stachewicz Polish Library  
at McGill University, Montreal



Thank you,  
Canada and City of Windsor!

